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The prophet of Islam

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# THE PROPHET OF ISLAM

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## THE PROPHET OF ISLAM

It was in the year 571 of the Christian era that the Holy Prophet Muhammad was born. At the time of his birth Arabia was steeped deep in the worst form of idolatry that has ever prevailed in any country. The Ka'ba, the spiritual centre of Arabia, was full of idols, and every household had, in addition, its own idols. Unhewn stones, trees and heaps of sand were also worshipped. And in spite of this vast and deep-rooted idolatry, the Arabs were, as Bosworth smith remarks, materialistic. "East and drink is," as he says, "the epicurean tone of the majority of the poems that have come down to us." There was practically no faith in a life after death, no feeling of responsibility for one's actions. They, however, believed in demons, and diseases were attributed to the influence of evil spirits. Ignorance prevailed among the high as well as the low, so much so that the noblest of men could boast of his ignorance,



There was no moral code and vice was rampant. The sexual relations were loose. Obscene poems and songs were recited in public assemblies. There was no punishment for adultery, nor any moral sanction against it. Prostitution had nothing dishonourable about it so that leading men could keep brothels. Women were "in the most degraded position, worse even than that in which they were under the laws of Manu in Hindustan" (Bosworth Smith). Woman was looked upon as mere chattel. Instead of having any right to inheritance of property, her own person formed part of the inheritance, so that the heir was able to dispose her of as he would, if he did not like to take her, were she his own step-mother, for a wife. There was no settled government, no law in the land, and might was practically right. They belonged to one race and spoke one language, yet they were the most disunited people, and tribe made war on tribe and family on family, on the most trivial excuse. The strong among them trampled upon the rights of the weak, and the weak could not get their wrongs redressed. The widow and the orphan were quite helpless and the slaves were treated most cruelly.

Among this people was born Muhammad, an

orphan from his birth who lost even his mother when six years old. He came of the noblest family of the Quraish, yet like the rest of his countrymen he was not taught reading and writing. He may have tended sheep for some time and the noblest of the Arabs had no contempt for that occupation, but in his youth he was chiefly occupied in trade. It was, however, high morals that distinguished him from the first from all his compatriots. The Holy Qur'ān which according to Muslim as well as non-Muslim authorities contains the most trustworthy account of the Prophet's life, says plainly that he was the possessor of sublime morals (lxviii. 4). Leading generally a reserved life, he had as his friends only those men whose moral elevation was recognised by the Meccans. The testimony to his truthfulness is borne to in the clearest words (vi. 33). His bitterest opponents were challenged to point out one black spot in his character during the forty years that he had passed among them before he received the Divine call (x. 16). It was in his youth that on account of his pure and unsoiled character and his love for truth and honesty he won the title of *al-Amin*, or the faithful one, from his compatriots. Living in a country in which idol-

worship was the everyday life of the community, he hated idolatry from his childhood, and the Holy Qur'ān is again our authority for the statement that he never bent his forehead before an idol (cix. 4) Even such a hostile biographer as Sir William Muir bears testimony to the purity of his character in his youth : "Our authorities all agree in ascribing to the youth of Mahomet a modesty of deportment and purity of manners rare among the Meceans." And again : "Endowed with a refined mind and delicate taste, reserved and meditative, he lived much within himself and the ponderings of his heart no doubt supplied occupation for leisure hours spent by others of a lower stamp in rude sports and profligacy. The fair character and honorable bearings of the unobtrusive youth won the approbation of his fellow-citizens ; and he received the title, by common consent of *Al-Amin*, the Faithful."

Though he lived in a city in which drinking orgies were only too common, yet never did a drop of wine touch his lips. Even Abu Bakr, his most intimate friend in his youth, never tested wine. The society at Mecca found pleasure in gambling, yet never did he take part in any such pastime. He lived in a nation that



was addicted to war as it was addicted to wine, yet he had no liking for either. To quote Muir again : "Though now nearly twenty years of age he had not acquired the love of arms." Perforce he had to take part on one occasion in the famous sacrilegious wars that continued for four years between the Quraish and the Hawāzin, yet he did no more than gather up arrows that came from the enemy and hand them over to his uncles. He did not even take to trading for love of wealth but simply out of regard for his uncle Abu Talib whom he loved to help. Thus says Muir : "Mahomet was never covetous of wealth, or at any period of his career energetic in the pursuit of riches for their own sake. If left to himself, he would probably have preferred the quiet and repose of his present life to the bustle and cares of a mercantile journey. He would not spontaneously have contemplated such an expedition. But when the proposal was made, his generous soul at once felt the necessity of doing all that was possible to relieve his uncle and he cheerfully responded to the call."

Above all, his earlier life was marked by that rare characteristic, rarest, of all in Arabia at the time, love of the poor, the orphan, the

widow, the weak, the helpless and the slave. Before he had affluence of means, he was one of the members who took the oath to stand by the oppressed and formed themselves into a league as champions of the injured. When at twenty-five he married the wealthy Khadijah, he spent freely for the help of the poor. No slave came into the household but was set free by him. He acquired such a fame for the help of the poor that when, after the Call, the Quraish demanded him of Abu Talib to put him to death, the old chief refused and praised him in a poem as the *Sayyid* (the chief) who "protected the orphans and the widows." Earlier than this when he received the Call and was diffident whether he would be able to achieve the grand object of reforming his countrymen, his wife Khadijah comforted him, saying that God would not disgrace him because he bore the burden of those who were weary and helped the poor and gave relief to those who were in distress and honoured the guest and loved his kinsmen.

To these great qualities was added his anxiety for a fallen humanity. The Qur'ān refers to it repeatedly (ix. 128; xviii. 6; xxvi. 3; xxxv. 8). As years went on, the gross idolatry of the

Arabs and their evil ways pressed more heavily on his heart, and he spent hours in solitude in the neighbouring mountains. Still later, he repaired for days to a cave at the foot of Mount Hira, and it was here that the Divine Light shone on him in its full splendence. At first fearing whether he would be able to perform the great task, his anxiety soon gave place to absolute faith that truth would ultimately triumph and he set to work with a strength of will and an inflexibility of purpose which could not be shaken by the severest opposition of the whole of Arabia. His message was from the first for all, for the Arab idolaters as well as the Jews, the Christians and the Magi who came in contact with him. Nor was it limited to the town of Mecca, for Mecca was the centre to which men and women flocked in thousands every year from all parts of Arabia, and through this assemblage the Prophet's message reached the most distant corners of Arabia. His wife Khadijah was the first to believe in him, and she was followed by others who were either his most intimate friends or knew him on account of close relationship to him. As Muir remarks : "It is strongly corroborative of Mahomet's sincerity that the earliest converts to Is-

lam were not only of upright character, but his own bosom friends and people of his household, who, intimately acquainted with his private life, could not fail otherwise to have detected those discrepancies which ever more or less exist between the professions of the hypocritical deceiver abroad and his actions at home."

His first revelations laid stress on the great power and majesty of the Divine Being and on the inevitability of the Judgement. The Quraish mocked at first, treated him contemptuously and called him a mad man. In spite of this he went gaining adherents by twos and threes, until within four years the number reached forty and persecution grew bitter. At first the slaves were tortured ; men like Bilāl, a negro by birth, who when made to lie on burning gravel under the Arabian midday sun would cry "One, One" to the bewilderment of his persecutors. But the fire of persecution once kindled could not be limited. Converts of high birth were made to suffer along with the poorer followers. The Prophet himself did not escape the cruelties of the persecutors. The Muslims could not gather together or say their prayers in a public place. Still he went on gaining new adherents, and his opponents became severer in their persecutions,



so much so that some of the humbler converts were put to death in a most brutal manner. The Prophet's tender heart melted at the sight of this brutal treatment of innocent men and women and caring little that he would be left alone among exasperated opponents, he advised the small band of his followers to betake themselves to a place of safety. Eleven men and women left Mecca in the fifth year, and migrated to Abyssinia. Thither they were followed by a deputation of their opponents that waited on the ruler of Abyssinia for their extradition. The Muslim case was put by their leader before the king as follows :

“O king ! we were an ignorant people, given to idolatry. We used to eat corpses even of animals that died a natural death, and to do all sorts of disgraceful things. We did not make good our obligations to our relations, and ill-treated our neighbours. The strong among us would thrive at the expense of the weak, till at last God raised a Prophet for our reformation. His descent, his righteousness, his integrity and his virtue are well-known to us. He invited us to the worship of God,

and bade us to give up idolatry and stone-worship. He enjoined on us to tell the truth, to make good our trust, to have regard for our kith and kin, and to do good to our neighbours. He taught us to shun everything foul and to avoid bloodshed. He forbade all sorts of indescient things, telling lies and misappropriating orphans' belongings. So we believed in him, followed him and acted up to his teachings. Thereupon our people began to do us wrong, to subject us to tortures, thinking that we might abjure our faith and revert to idolatry. When however their cruelties exceeded all bounds, we came to seek an asylum in your country."

The Negus was touched deeply by this statement and by a recitation from the Holy Qur'ān, and refused to deliver the Muslims to their enemies. More Muslims went to Abyssinia next year, until the total reached 101 excluding children. The Quraish tried their utmost to check the tide of emigration but all in vain. They got, however, exasperated beyond all measure at the Prophet and the little band of Muslims that remained with him at Mecca. Not

being able to prevail upon Abu Talib, the head of the Hashimites (the Prophet's family), to make over the Prophet to them and failing to tempt the Holy Prophet by offering him Kingship, wealth and beauty, they at last entered into league and shut the Hashimites and the Muslims in a small quarter, where they suffered the utmost privations for three long years, being allowed liberty of action only during the time of the pilgrimage. These three years were of the hardest suffering for the Muslims and Islam itself made little progress during the time.

Released at last from this imprisonment, the Prophet, though facing disappointment on all sides, had still as much faith in the triumph of the truth as ever. If Mecca was now quite deaf to his preaching he would turn to another place. He went to Taif, another great city of Arabia. Here, however, he found the ground even harder than at Mecca. He was not allowed even to stay there after ten days, and as he walked back he was pelted with stones. Dripping with blood and not even allowed by his persecutors to take rest, he at last, returned to Mecca, a sader man than when he left it. But while men would not listen to him, yet would he

open his heart to God Who was always ready to listen and he prayed to Him thus when coming back from Taif :

“O My God ! to Thee do I complain of the feebleness of my strength and of my lack of resourcefulness and of my insignificance in the eyes of people. Thou art most Merciful of the merciful. Thou art the Lord of the weak. To whom wilt Thou entrust me, to an unsympathetic foe who would sullenly frown at me, or to a close friend to whom Thou hast given control over my affair? Not in the least do I care for anything except that I may have Thy protection for me. In the light of Thy face do I seek shelter in the light which illumines the heaven and dispels all sorts of darkness, and which controls all affairs in this world as well as in the hereafter. May it never be that I should incur Thy wrath or that Thou shouldest be displeased with me. There is no strength, nor power, but in Thee.”

He feels that no man lends his ear to his message, yet his faith in the goodness of God and in the ultimate triumph of his cause is as



unshaken as ever. To him God is all and the opposition of the whole world is nothing. With marvellous calmness he undergoes the severest hardships which he has to suffer for working for the good of these very people who take pleasure in inflicting on him the cruellest tortures. All these, he says, are insignificant so long as he enjoys the pleasure of God ! What a firm faith in God, what a cheerful resignation to His supreme will, what an unalloyed spiritual happiness !

Three years more passed away at Mecca amidst the most trying circumstances. In the meanwhile Islam took root in Medina and spread fast. As the thirteenth year of the Call drew to a close, seventy-five Muslims (including two women) from Medina came to perform a pilgrimage and swore all allegiance to the Prophet, that if he chose to go to Medina, they would defend him against his enemies, just as they defended their own children and wives. Then it was that the Muslim exodus to Medina commenced. The Prophet chose to remain alone among an enemy that was growing more and more exasperated, and see his followers safe at the new centre. It shows the depth of his love and concern for his followers. He was anxious more for their safety

than his own. Within two months, about 150 Muslims left Mecca and there remained only the Prophet with two of his closest friends. The psychological moment had now arrived for his enemies to deal the final blow. Individual efforts had hitherto been made to make away with the Prophet but they had failed. If the final blow was not struck immediately now, the Prophet might escape to Medina and get beyond their reach. A big conference of all the tribes was held and a final decision taken. A youth from each clan was to be selected and all of them were to fall upon the Prophet at one and the same time, so that no particular clan should be held accountable for the murder. The Prophet's house was besieged by these blood-thirsty youths as soon as it was dark, but undaunted and having his faith in Divine protection the Prophet passed through them unnoticed. In the dark of the night with only one companion he wended his way through the streets of Mecca to the bare and rugged hills outside, and a hiding place was ultimately found in a cave known as Thaur. When morning appeared, the enemy saw the failure of their plan. The whole country around was scoured. One party reached right up to the mouth of the cave. Through a

crevice, Abu Bakr saw the enemy at the mouth and grieved. "Do not grieve, for God is with us," said the Prophet. The more helpless he became, the stronger grew his faith in God. And surely some invisible power saved him throughout his life every time that the enemy's hand was on him, after three days the Prophet and his companion started for Medina.

It was not the Prophet alone who bore all the hard trials so willingly at Mecca for thirteen years. Those who accepted him also bore persecutions with the same willing heart. The new life to which the Prophet had awakened them has drawn words of praise even from such a hostile writer as Sir William Muir :

"The believers bore persecutions with a patient and tolerant spirit.....One hundred men and women, rather than abjure their precious faith, had abandoned home and sought refuge, till the storm should be overpast, in Abyassinian exile. And now again a still larger number, with the Prophet himself, were emigrating from their fondly-loved city with its sacred Temple, to them the holiest spot on earth, and fleeing to Medina. There, the same

marvellous charm had within two or three years been preparing for them a brotherhood ready to defend the Prophet and his followers with their blood. Jewish truth had long sounded in the ears of the men of Medina ; but it was not until they heard the spirit-stirring strains of the Arabian Prophet that they too awoke from their slumber, and sprang suddenly into a new and earnest life."

We have seen that when the Muslims fled to Abyssinia, the Quraish tried all means in their power to have them expelled from there. How could they see Islam prosper so near home at Medina and sit silent ? In the second year of the Flight, they launched their first attack on Medina, but were met by the Holy Prophet at Badr, three days journey from Medina and ten days from Mecca. They were about a thousand strong well-equipped warriors and the Muslims only about three hundred, yet they suffered a crushing defeat, almost all the leaders being killed. Next year about the same time they came with a force of three thousand men. The number of the Muslims that could take field against them was only seven hundred. The



field of battle was at the foot of the Mount Uhud, three miles north of Medina. The enemy suffered a reverse at first, but a number of the Muslim archers made a mistake in vacating a certain position which they had been strictly commanded not to leave on any account. The Muslim army was attacked from the rear and suffered a severe loss before it was able to rally round the Holy Prophet. The enemy left the field unpursued by the Muslims. Two years later, they came with a huge army determined to give a crushing blow to Islam at Medina. The Muslims found themselves unable to fight them in the open and dug a ditch round the city, the battle being thus known as the Battle of the Ditch. It is also known as the Battle of the Allies on account of the Quraish coming along with all the allies that they could summon to their help. The lowest estimate of the invading army is 10,000 and the highest 25,000. The siege continued for about a month, when a severe midnight gale cast such terror into the heart of the enemy that they took to flight before morning. After that the Quraish could not gather up courage to attack Medina. But all along they did their best to incite the other tribes against whom the Prophet was compelled

to undertake expeditions now and then.

Towards the close of the sixth year of the Flight, the Holy Prophet went to perform a pilgrimage with about 1,500 of his companions, but was not allowed to enter the sacred territory. A truce was arranged for ten years, but its terms were violated by the Meccans about two years later, and the Holy Prophet therefore marched on Mecca with an army of ten thousand. The Meccans were unable to meet this army and the Prophet made an announcement of a general amnesty to all who did not offer violence, and practically a bloodless conquest of the city was accomplished. "What treatment do you expect from me?" said the Holy Prophet, addressing the people who now lay at his mercy but who when in power had left no stone unturned to blot out Islam and to crush the Muslims, who had expelled them from their homes and had not even allowed them to lead their lives in peace at a distant place, who had persecuted hundreds and shed innocent Muslim blood. But they knew *al-Amin* of old, they knew that he had a generous heart within his breast. "Thou art a noble brother, the son of a noble brother," was their unhesitating reply. But the treatment he accorded to

them exceeded even their own expectations. "This day," he said in the words of Joseph to his brothers, "there is no reproof against you." They were yet unbelievers, but mark the magnanimity of the great soul who would not even reproach them for their evil deeds, who let them go even without taking a pledge from them for the future. Here was a practical proof of that laudable precept: "Love thy enemy." Not only was Mecca conquered but with it were conquered also the hearts of the bitterest foes of Islam. They now saw with their own eyes how the combined force of opposition offered by the whole country had proved an utter failure against the mighty truth which came from the lips of a man who stood alone in the midst of all opposition. The righteousness of the cause was now only too clear to them and men and women came forward spontaneously to embrace the faith. There was not a single instance of conversion by force. And those that still adhered to the old religion were treated in the same spirit of friendliness as the members of the Brotherhood. Even Muir has to admit:

"Although the city had cheerfully accepted his authority, all its inhabitants had not yet embraced the new religion, nor

formally acknowledged his prophetic claim. Perhaps he intended to follow the course he had persued at Medina, and leave the conversion of the people to be gradually accomplished without compulsion."

The fall of Mecca was a signal to the whole of Arabia. In fact the Quraish of Mecca were generally at the bottom of all organised opposition. With the only exception of the Battle of Hunain which had to be undertaken against the Hawāzin immediately after the conquest of Mecca, regular warfare between the Muslims and the non-Muslims in the whole of Arabia now came to an end, and even at Hunain, the unbelieving Meccans fought on the side of the Muslims. But if Islam was freed of trouble from within, the Christian power on the north viewed its strength with a jealous eye, and persistent news as to preparations of the Roman Empire to attack Arabia could not be ignored. Accordingly an expedition of thirty thousand men was led by the Holy Prophet personally to the northern frontier. When he reached Tabuk, however he found that his march had a restraining effect on the enemy, and there being no hostile force in the field, the Holy Prophet re-

turned without either attacking the Romans or declaring war against them. In fact he always observed the Qur'ānic injunction to fight only with those who took up the sword first to fight against the Muslims. After return from Tabuk, peace was practically established in the whole of Arabia though the Islamic territory was not quite free from groups of marauders. It was then that deputations from far and near began to come in to wait upon the Prophet and to learn the truth about Islam, and within about a year and a half, the whole of Arabia was converted to Islam. It was not only a conversion in the sense that idolatry was given up for the purest monotheism ; nay it was a conversion of the entire nation, from one end of the vast peninsula to the other, in all spheres of life, ignorance, superstition and barbarism giving place to a rational outlook on all aspects of life. And with his task thus accomplished, the Holy Prophet performed his last pilgrimage to the Sacred House towards the end of the tenth year of the Flight, and in the eleventh year on the 12th of Rabi' al-Awwal (corresponding with June 632 of the Christian era) commended his soul to the great Maker, with the words "Blessed companionship on High" on his lips.



I have given a very brief outline of the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. The most outstanding characteristic of that life, as even the brief outline given above would not fail to show, is the amazing success which the Prophet achieved. The transformation wrought within the short space of less than a quarter of a century is in fact unparalleled in the history of the world. There is not a single reformer who brought about such an entire change in the life of a whole nation inhabiting such a vast country. None in fact found his people at such a depth of degradation as the Prophet found the Arabs, and no one raised them materially, morally or spiritually to the height to which he raised them. So deep-rooted was their idolatry, so powerful the bonds of their superstitions and their usage that the propaganda efforts of the Jews and the Christians carried on for hundreds of years one after the other, with the material power of kingdom at their back, could not bring about the least change in their condition. The indigenous Arab movement of the Hanifs proved even a greater failure. All these attempts at reform left the Arabs as a nation as ignorant of all principles of religion and morality as they ever were. Twenty-three years, work of the

Holy Prophet, however, quite metamorphosed them. The worship of idols and of all objects other than God, whether in heaven or earth, was now considered to be a disgrace to humantiy. No trace of an idol was left throughout the whole of Arabia. The whole nation awakened to a sense of true dignity of manhood and realised the folly of falling prostrate before things which man was made to rule and before powers which he was required to conquer, as the Holy Qur'ān had painly stated. Superstition gave place to a rational religion. The Arab was not only cleansed of deep-rooted vices and bare-faced immorality ; nay, he was further inspired with a burning desire for the best and noblest deeds of the service of, not country and nations, but what is far higher than that, humanity. Old customs which involved injustice to the weak and the opposed were all swept off, as if by a magician's wand, and just and reasonable laws took their place. Drunkenness to which Arab was addicted from time immemorial disappeared so entirely that the very goblets and vessels which were used for drinking and keeping wine could no more be found. Gambling was now quite unknown and the loose relations of the sexes gave place to the highest

regard for chasity. The Arab who prided himself on ignorance became the lover of knowledge, drinking deep at every fountain of learning to which he could get access. And greatest of all, from an Arabia the various elements of which were so constantly at war with each other that the whole country was about to perish, was "on the brink of a pit of fire," as the Qur'an so tersely puts it—from these jarring and warring elements, the Prophet welded out a nation, a united nation full of life and vigour, before whose onward march the greatest kingdoms of the world crumbled down as if they were but toys before the reality of the new faith. No man ever breathed such a new life on such a wide scale—a life affecting all branches of human activity; a transformation of the individual, of the family, of the society, of the nation, of the country; an awakening, material as well as moral, intellectual as well as spiritual. Here are a few testimonies from non-Muslim, some times anti-Muslim, writers:

"The prospects of Arabia before Mohamet were as unfavourable to religious reform as they were to political union or national regeneration. The foundation of Arab faith was a deep-rooted

idolatry, which for centuries had stood proof, with no palpable symptom of decay, against every attempt at evangelization from Egypt and Syria" (Muir).

"During the youth of Mahomet the aspect of the Peninsula was strongly conservative ; perhaps never at any previous time was reform more hopeless" (Muir).

"Causes are sometimes eonjured up to account for results produced by an agent apparently inadequate to effect them. Mahoment arose, and forthwith the Arabs were aroused to a new and a spiritual faith; hence the conclusion that Arabia was fermenting for the change and prepared to adopt it. To us calmly reviewing the past, pre-Islamite history belies the assumption" (Muir).

"From time beyond memory Mecca and the whole Peninsula had been steepe d spiritual torpor. The slight and transient influences of Judaism, Christianity, or philosophical enquiry, upon the Arab mind had been but as the ruffling here and there of the surface of a quiet

lake; all remained still and motionless below. The people were sunk in superstition, cruelty and vice. . . . This religion was a gross idolatry; and their faith, the dark superstitions dread of unseen things. . . . Thirteen years before Hegira, Mecca lay lifeless in this debased state. What a change had these thirteen years now produced. . . . Jewish truth had long sounded in the ears of the men of Medina; but it was not until they heard the spirit-stirring strains of the Arabian Prophet that they took awoke from their slumber and sprang suddenly into a new and earnest life" (Muir).

"And yet we may truly say that no history can boast of events that strike the imagination in a more lively manner or can be more surprising in themselves, than those we meet with in the life of the first Musalman; whether we consider the Great Chief, or his ministers, the most illustrious of men: or whether we take an account of the manners of the several countries he conquered: or observe the courage, virtue and senti-



ments that equally prevailed among his generals and soldiers" (*Life of Mahomet* by Count of Boulainvilliers).

"A more disunited people it would be hard to find, till, suddenly, the miracle took place. A man arose who, by his personality and by his claim to direct Divine guidance, actually brought about the impossible, namely, the union of all these warring factions" (*Ins and outs of Mesopot.*)

"Never has a people been led more rapidly to civilization, such as it was, than were the Arabs through Islam" (*New Researches* by Hirshfeld).

"Such then, very briefly, was the condition of the Arabs, social and religious, when, to use an expression of Voltaire, . . . 'the turn of Arabia came'; when the hour had already struck for the most complete, the most sudden and the most extraordinary revolution that had ever come over any nation upon earth" (Bosworth Smith).

"Of all the religious personalities of the world, Muhammad was the most successful" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Art. "Koran").

Yet there is another feature distinguishing the Holy Prophet of Islam from all other teachers, and that is that while the achievements of every great man are limited to generally one aspect of life, those of the Holy Prophet cover the whole field of human conditions. If, for instance, greatness consists in the reformation of a degraded people, who can have a greater claim to greatness than the man who uplifted an entire nation, sunk low as the Arabs were, and made them the torch-bearers of civilization and learning? If greatness lies in unifying the discordant elements of society into a harmonious whole, who can have a better title to the distinction than the man who welded together a people like the Arabs, rent into warring tribes with blood-feuds extending over generations? Like the sands of the desert, the Arabs lay scattered when the Prophet appeared, and he cemented them into a solid whole. If greatness consists in wiping out superstitious beliefs, evil usage and vice of every sort, the Prophet stands unrivalled for wiping out all these things from Arabia. If it lies in displaying high morals, who can be a match for one admitted by friend and foe as *al-Amin*, or the

Faithfull? If a conqueror is a great man, history cannot point to the like of the Prophet, who rose from a helpless orphan to be a mighty conqueror and king; nay, who founded a great empire that has withstood all these thirteen centuries the united world attempt at its destruction. If the living, driving force that a leader commands is the criterion of greatness, the Prophet's name even to-day exerts a magic charm over four hundred million souls spread all over world, whom it binds together in a strong chord of fraternity, irrespective of caste, colour or country.

Of the many benefits conferred by the Holy Prophet on humanity in general, for which he is called *Rahmatul-lil alamin* or a mercy for the nations, I would mention only one more. He taught what no teacher before him had ever taught, not only that a prophet had appeared in every nation, but also that the Muslims must believe in all those prophets just as he believed in the Prophet Muhammad. "There is not a people but a warner has gone among them," says the Holy Qur'ān. And again, it defines true Muslims as those "who believe in that which has been revealed to thee and that which was revealed before thee." In these

words, the Prophet laid down the basis of a universal peace. He not only taught how one individual could live at peace with another, but also how different tribes and families of the human race should live in peace and harmony with each other, and, to crown all, what nobody in the world had ever attempted, how peace could be brought about among the contending religions of the world. He taught, and never before him had the truth found expression through any prophet, that there is not a nation on the face of the earth but has had a Divine Messenger of its own. Profession of faith in all the religious reformers raised among different nations is in fact the only thing that can bring peace to the different warring factions of humanity that follow this or that prophet, and it was to bring about universal peace that the Holy Prophet Muhammad laid down in clear words that a prophet was raised in every nation and that a true Muslim must believe in all the prophets.

It may be added here that the Muslim's faith in the prophets of other nations is not limited to those prophets who are mentioned by name in the Holy Qur'ān, for twice does the Holy Book plainly say : "And We sent apostles



We have mentioned to thee and apostles We have not mentioned to thee" (iv. 164). It was for this reason that when the companions of the Holy Prophet came in contact with the Magi of Persia, they accorded the same treatment to them as they accorded to the Jews and the Christians, which shows that they treated them as the followers of the Book. With the plain words of the Holy Qur'an "that there is no people but a warner has gone among them" ringing in their ears, how could they do otherwise? And a Muslim is bound to believe that a vast country like India, and a huge nation like the Hindus, could not be without a book or without its prophets.

A misconception prevails generally among all non-Muslims. It is that the Holy Prophet Muhammad preached his faith with the sword. It is a myth pure and simple. The basic principle of Islam, a faith in all the prophets of the world, is enough to give the lie to this allegation. The great and liberal mind that preached not only love and respect for the founders of the great religions of the world but much more than that—*faith in them*—could not shrink down to the narrowness of intolerance for those very religions. Tolerance is not in fact the word that

can sufficiently indicate the breadth of the attitude of Islam to other religions. It preaches equal love for all, equal respect for all, equal faith in all.

Again, intolerance could not be ascribed to a book which excludes compulsion from the sphere of religion altogether: "There is no compulsion in religion" (ii. 56)—it lays down in the clearest words. In fact, the Holy Qur'ān is full of statements showing that belief in this or that religion is a person's own concern and that he is given the choice to adopt one way or another; that if he accepts truth, it is for his own good, and that if he sticks to error, it is to his own detriment. I give below a few of these quotations:

"We have shown him the way, he may be thankful" (lxxvi. 3).

"The truth is from your Lord, so let him who please believe and let him who please disbelieve" (xviii. 29).

"Indeed there have come to you clear proofs from your Lord: whoever will therefore see, it is for the good of his own soul, and whoever will disbelieve, it shall be against himself" (vi. 105).

"If you do good, you will do good for your

own souls, and if you do evil, it shall be for them" (xvii 7).

The Prophet was allowed to fight indeed, but what was the object? Not to compel the unbelievers to accept Islam which was against all the broad principles which he had taught. No, it was to establish religious freedom, to stop all religious persecution, to protect the houses of worship of all religions, mosques among them. Here are a few quotations from the Holy Qur'ān:

"And had there not been God's repelling some people by others, cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques would have been pulled down in which God's name is much remembered" (xxii. 40).

"And fight with them until there is no persecution and religion is only for God" (ii. 193).

"And fight with them until there is no more persecution and all religions should be for God" (viii. 39).

The conditions under which the permission to fight was given to the Muslims have already been described. Every student of Islamic history knows that Holy Prophet and his companions were subject to the severest persecu-

tions as Islam began to gain ground at Mecca ; over a hundred of them fled to Abyssinia, but persecution grew more relentless still. Ultimately the Muslims had to take refuge in Medina but they were not left alone even there and the sword was taken up by the enemy to annihilate Islam and Muslims altogether. The Qur'ān bears express testimony to this : "Permission to fight is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed, and God is well able to assist them : those who have been expelled from their homes without a just cause except that they say, Our Lord is God" (xxii 39, 40) Later, the express condition was laid down : "And fight in the way of God with those who fight with you, and do not exceed, for God does not love those who exceed the limits (ii. 190).

The Qur'ān therefore allowed fighting only to save a persecuted community from powerful oppressors and hence the condition was laid down that fighting was to be stopped as soon as persecution ceased : "But if they desist, then God is Forgiving, Merciful. And fight with them until there is no persecution" (ii. 192, 193) If the enemy offered peace, peace was to be accepted, though the enemy's intention may be



only to deceive the Muslims ; “And if they incline to peace, do thou incline to it and trust in God ; He is the Hearing, the Knowing And if they intend to deceive thee, then surely God is sufficient for thee” (viii. 61, 62). The Prophet made treaties of peace with his enemies ; one such treaty brought about the famous truce of Hudabiyya, the terms of which were not only disadvantageous but also humiliating to the Muslims. According to the terms of this treaty, “if an unbeliever, being converted to Islam, went over to the Muslims, he was to be returned but if a Muslim went over to the unbelievers, he was not to be given back to the Muslims ” This term of the treaty cuts at the root of all allegations of the use of force by the Holy Prophet. It also shows the strong conviction of the Holy Prophet that neither would Muslims go back to unbelief, nor would the new converts to Islam be deterred from embracing Islam because the Prophet gave them no shelter. And the expectations proved true for, while not a single Muslim deserted Islam, a large number came over to Islam and being refused shelter at Medina formed a colony of their own in neutral territory.

It is a mistake to suppose that the condi-

tions related above were abrogated at any time. The condition to fight "with those who fight with you" remained in force to the last. The last expedition led by the Holy Prophet was the famous Tabuk expedition, and, as already stated, though the Prophet had marched a very long distance to Tabuk at the head of an army of thirty thousand, yet when he found that the enemy did not fulfil the condition laid down above, he returned and did not allow his troops to attack the enemy territory. There is not a single instance of an expedition being sent to convert a people by force; nay, there is not a single case in which the Prophet ever asked a man to believe on the pain of death. The waging of war on unbelievers to compel them to accept Islam is a myth pure and simple. It was the enemy that waged war on the Muslims to turn them away from their religion as the Holy Qur'ān so clearly asserts: "And they will not cease fighting with you until they turn you back from your religion, if they can" (ii. 217).

It is sometimes asserted that the Qur'ān forbids relations of friendship with the followers of other religions. How could a book which allows a man to have as his wife a woman following another religion (v. 5) say in the

same breath that no friendly relations can be had with the followers of other religions? The loving relation of husband and wife is the friendliest of all relations, and when this is expressly permitted, there is not the least reason to suppose that other friendly relations are forbidden. The fact is that wherever there is a prohibition against making friends with other people, it relates only to the people who were at war with the Muslims, and this is plainly stated in the Qur'ān :

“God does not forbid you respecting those who have not made war against you on account of your religion, and have not driven you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly; for God loves the doers of justice. God only forbids you respecting those who made war upon you on account of your religion and drove you forth from your homes, and backed up others in your expulsion, that you make friends with them, and whoever makes friends with them, these are too unjust” (lx. 8, 9)

Another widely prevailing misconception may also be noted here. It is generally thought

that the Qur'ān provides a death sentence for those who desert the religion of Islam. Anyone who takes the trouble to read the Qur'ān will see that there is not the least ground for such a supposition. The Qur'ān speaks repeatedly of people going back to unbelief after believing, but never once does it say that they should be killed or punished. I give here a few quotations :

“And whoever of you turns back from his religion, then he dies while an unbeliever, these it is whose deeds shall go for nothing in this world and the hereafter” (ii. 217).

“O you who believe ! should one of you turn back from his religion, then God will bring a people whom He shall love and they too shall love Him” (v. 54).

“Those who disbelieve after their believing then increase in disbelief, their repentance shall not be accepted, and these are they that go astray” (iii. 89).

On the other hand, the Qur'ān speaks of plan of the Jews to adopt Islam first and then desert it, thus creating the impression that Islam was not a religion worth having (iii. 71). Such a scheme could never have entered the

heads while living at Medina where the government was Muslim, if apostasy according to the Qur'ānic law were punishable with death. The misconception seems to have arisen from the fact that people who after becoming apostates joined the enemy were treated as enemies, or where an apostate took the life of a Muslim he was put to death, not of course for changing his religion but for committing murder.

The man who brought about the most thorough transformation of a nation within twent years, who alone and unaided swept off vice and immorality from a whole country where the most strenuous efforts of powerful missionary nations had hopelessly foiled, who by his personal example purified the lives of vast numbers of humanity,—could such a man himself be in the grip of sin? An impure man could not consistently preach virtue? how could he take others by the hand, and free them from bondage of sin, and inspire his very soldiers and generals with sentiments of virtue? Could a man who himself groped in the dark lead others to light? And yet an attempt is made in many quarters even to-day to depict Muhammad who had done all this, as a profligate, simply because he resorted to polygamy. Whatever may be the



views on polygamy of a world itself sunk deep in immoral practices, there is not the least doubt that plurality of wives is met with in the lives of the great religious personages who by a consensus of opinion led lives of transcendent purity. Abraham who is held in reverence by more than half the world up to this day had more wives than one. Similar was the case with Jacob, Moses and David among the Israelities, and with some of the famous and revered sages of Hindus. The example of Jesus is quite out of question as, according to the Gospels, he did not marry, and if this example were followed, the world would come to an end before long, Yet it is true that these great sages were not led away by sensual desires to a polygamous life. Purity in all respect is the outstanding characteristic of their lives, and this fact alone is sufficient to condemn the attempt to defame them on the basis of their resorting to polygamy. What object their was in doing so, it is difficult to say at the present day, as their histories are generally enveloped in darkness, but as the life of Holy Prophet Muhammad can be read in the full light of history, we will take his case in detail.

This life of the Prophet may be divided into

four periods so far as his domestic life is concerned. Up to twenty-five he led a celibate life; from twenty-five to fifty-four, he lived in a married state with one wife; from fifty-four to sixty he contracted several marriages; and lastly from sixty till his death he did not contract any new marriage. The most important period to determine whether the Prophet was slave to his passions is the period of celibacy. If he had not been a complete master of his passions, he could not have led an exceptionally chaste and pure life, which won him the title of *al Amin* to the age of twenty-five in hot country like Arabia where development must necessarily take place early and passions are generally stronger. His worst enemies could not point to a single blot on his character when challenged later (x. 16). Even according to a hostile writer like Sir William Muir, already quoted, all authorities agree "in ascribing to the youth of Mahomet a modesty of deportment and purity of manners rare among the people of Mecca." Now youth is the time when passions run riot, and the man who is able to control his passions in youth, and that in celibacy, cannot possibly be conceived as falling a prey to lust in his old age. Thus the

first period of his life, his celibacy up to twenty five years of age, is a conclusive proof that he could never fall a prey to his passions. It should be noted in this connection that in Arab society at the time there was no moral sanction against an immoral life, so that it may be said that he was kept back from an evil course by the moral force of society. No, profligacy was the order of the day ; and it was among people who prided on loose sexual relations that the Holy Prophet Muhammad led a life of transcendent purity, and therefore all the more credit is due to his purity of character.

Take now the next period, the period of monogamous married life. When twenty-five years of age, he married a widow, Kadija fifteen years his senior, and led a life of utmost devotion with her till she died when he was fifty years of age. Now, polygamy was the rule in Arabia at the time, and the wife had no cause of complaint, nor did she ever grumble, the husband brought in a second or a third wife. Marriage with Khadijah had enriched him though polygamy in Arabia was not limited to the rich : the poor as well resorted to it. The wife being a help-mate in the real sense of the word, because she helped the husband in ear-

ing livelihood, as woom generally do in the labour classes, the poor had nothing to lose by resorting to polygamy. The Prophet belonged to the noblest family of the Quraish and if he had chosen to marry another wife, it would have been quite easy for him. But he led a monogamous life of the utmost devotion to his wife during all this while. When Khadijah died, he married a very elderly lady named Saudah, whose only recommendation for the honour was that she was the widow of a faithful companion of his who had to fly to Abyssinia from the persecution of the Quraish. The main part of his life from twenty-five to fifty-four, was thus an example for his followers that monogamy was the rule in married life.

Now comes the third period. Of all his wives 'Ayesha was the only virgin whom he married. Her father Abu Bakr, the closest friend of the Holy Prophet, had offered her to him when he suffered the great bereavement of losing both his wife Khadijah and his uncle Abu Talib. The girl was one possessing exceptional qualities and both Abu Bakr and the Prophet saw in her the great woman of the future who was best suited to perform the duties of the wife of a teacher who was to be a

perfect exemplar for mankind. So the Holy Prophet accepted her ; but she had not yet apparently reached the age of puberty, and her marriage was consummated towards the close of the second year of the Flight. \* In the

\*A great misconception prevails as to the age at which 'Ayesha was taken in marriage by the Holy Prophet. Ibn Sa'd has stated in the *Tabaqat* that when Abu Bakr was approached on behalf of the Holy Prophet, he replied that the girl had already been betrothed to Jubair, and that he will have to settle the matter first with him. This shows that 'Ayesha must have been approaching majority at that time. Again, the *Isaba*, speaking of the Prophet's daughter Fatima, says that she was born five years before the Call and was about five years older than 'Ayesha. This shows that 'Ayesha must have been about ten years at the time of her betrothal to the Holy Prophet and not six years as she is generally supposed to be. This result is borne out by the fact that 'Ayesha herself is reported to have stated that when the Chapter of the Moon (54th chapter) was revealed she was a girl playing about and remembered certain verses that were revealed. Now, the 54th chapter could not have been revealed later than the sixth year of the Call. All these considerations point to but one conclusion, viz, that 'Ayesha could not have been less than ten years of age at the time of her *nikah* which was virtually only a betrothal. And there is at least one report in the *Tabaqat* that 'Ayesha was nine years of age at the time of the *nikah*. Again, it is a fact admitted on all hands that the *nikah* of 'Ayesha took place in the tenth year of the Call in the month of Shawwal while there was also the preponderance of evidence as to the consummation of her marriage taking place in the second year of the Hijra in the same month, which shows that full five years had elapsed between the *nikah* and the consummation. The popular report which speaks of her being six or seven years of age at *nikah* and nine years at consummation is therefore historically incorrect, because it supposes the period between the *nikah* and consummation to be only two at the most three years. Hence, there is not the least doubt that 'Ayesha was at least nine or ten years of age at the time of betrothal and fourteen or fifteen years at the time of marriage.



second year of the Flight began the series of battles with the Quraish and the other Arab tribes, which appreciably reduced the number of males, the bread-winners of the family. These battles continued up to the eighth year of the flight, and it was during this time that the Holy Prophet contracted all the marriages which appear objectionable to the modern mind, to which neither friend nor foe looked upon with disapprobation at the time. And how could they do so, for they saw that it was an act of compassion, and was not due to any indulgence of the passions? Even a Christian writer admits this when he says: "It would be remembered, however, that most of Muhammad's marriages may be explained, at least, as much by his pity for the forlorn condition of the persons concerned, as by other motives. They were almost all of them widows who were not remarkable either for their beauty or their wealth, but quite the reverse." And what other motives could there be? Let us look at facts straight in the face. The Prophet had now a young and beautiful wife in 'Ayesha in his house. None of the other wives whom he married later compared with her either in youth or beauty. Surely then it was not attraction

for beauty that led to these marriages. And we have already seen that from his youth till his old age the Prophet remained a complete master of his passions. The man who could live in celibacy up to twenty-five years, and still have the reputation of a spotless character, who up to fifty-four lived with a single wife, and this notwithstanding the fact that polygamy was more the rule than the exception at the time and that a polygamous connection was not in the least objectionable—such a man could not be said to have changed all of a sudden after fifty-five when old age does generally soothe the passions even of those who cannot control their passions in youth. No other motive than compassion for the ladies who were given this honour can be attached to these marriages. If there had been any less honourable motive, his choice would have fallen on others than widows, and under the Arab custom a man in his position could have plenty of youthful virgins.

I have said that a change for the worse could not come over a man who had led an undoubtedly spotless life until he reached the fifty-fifth year of his life. If the beauty of women could not excite his passions in youth and lead him away from the path of rectitude, how could

it lead him away in old age ? And what were the circumstances in which he lived at Medina during these years. It was not a life of ease and luxury that he was leading at the time ; it was a life of hardness, because it was at this very time that he had to carry on a life-and-death struggle with the enemies of Islam. Huge armies came to crush him and to the small band of Muslims at Medina. The whole of Arabia was aflame against him. He was not secure for a minute. Battles had to be fought in quick successions. Expeditions had to be arranged and sent. "Prophet of God ! we are tired of being in arms day and night" would his companions say to him and he had to console them by telling them that time would come when a traveller would be able to go from one end of the country to the other without having any arms. The Jews and the Christians were his enemies along with the idolaters. His best friends were falling sometimes in battles and sometimes by treachery. Is it possible for a man to lead a life of ease and luxury under such circumstances ? Even if a man had the mind to lead a life of self-indulgence, which the Prophet according to all available evidence had not, this was not the opportune time for it. Under such circumstances of warfare, with enemies within

Medina and enemies all around it, with the number of the Muslims being insignificantly small in comparison with the enemy, with news of assaults by overwhelming numbers on all the four sides; even a profligate's life would be changed, to say nothing of a man of avowed purity of character, which no temptation could shake, turning into a profligate.

If the Prophet's days, during this period were passed so strenuously, how did he pass the nights? He had a number of lawful wives but did he spend away his nights in enjoyment with them? There is the clearest evidence on record in the Holy Qur'ān (iv. 20; lxxiii. 1) as well as the traditions that he passed half the night, and sometimes even more than that in praying to God and in reciting the Holy Qur'ān while standing in prayer. He would stand so long that his feet would get swollen. Could such a man be said to taking wives for self-indulgence when the minutest details of his life as available to us show conclusively that it was a strenuous life farthest away from indulgence of every kind?

Let us now take another point. Was any change really witnessed in the later phase of his life when he became the ruler of a State?

“In the shepherd of the desert, in the Syrian trader, in the solitary of Mount Hira, in the reformer in the minority of one, in the exile of Medina, in the acknowledged conqueror, in the equal of the Persian Chosroes and the Greek Heracleus, we can still trace a substantial unity. I doubt whether any other man whose external conditions changed so much, ever himself changed less to meet them ; the accidents are changed, the essence seems to me to be the same in all” (Bosworth Smith). From the cradle to the grave the Prophet passed through a diversity of circumstances—a diversity which can hardly be met with in the life of a single man. Orphanhood is the extreme of helplessness, while kingship is the height of power. From an orphan he climbed to the summit of royal glory, but that did not create the slightest change in his way of living. He lived on exactly the same kind of humble food, wore the same simple dress, and in all particulars led the same life as he led in the state of orphanhood. It is hard to give up the kingly throne and lead the life of a hermit, but it is far harder that one should wield the royal sceptre yet at the same time lead a hermit’s life, that one should possess power and wealth yet spend it solely to promote



the welfare of others, that one should ever have the most alluring attractions before one's eyes yet should never for one moment be captivated by them. When the Prophet actually became the ruler of a State, the furniture of his house was composed of a matting of palm-leaves for his bed and an earthen jug for water. Some nights he would go without food. For days no fire would be lit in his house to prepare food, the whole family living on mere dates. There was no lack of means to live a life of ease and comfort. The public treasury was at his disposal. The well-to-do among his followers, who did not shrink from sacrificing their lives for his sake, would have been only too glad to provide him with every comfort of life, should he choose to avail himself of it. But worldly things carried little weight in his estimation. No mundane craving could ever prevail over him neither in times of indigence nor of plenty. Just as he spurned at wealth, power and beauty, which the Quraish offered him when he was yet in state of utmost helplessness, so did he remain indifferent to them when God granted him all these things out of His Grace.

Not only did he himself live the simplest life of a labourer, he did not even allow

wealth to have any attraction for his wives. Shortly after their immigration into Medina, the condition of the Muslims had changed, and they carried on a prosperous trade. The later conquests went further to add to the comforts of life which the Muslims enjoyed. Quite a human desire crept into the hearts of the Prophet's wives that, like other Muslim families, they too should avail themselves of their share of comforts. Accordingly they approached the Prophet in body to prevail upon him to allow them their legitimate share of worldly comforts. Thereupon came the Divine injunction: "O Prophet! say to thy wives, 'if you desire this world's life and its ornature, I will give you a provision and allow you to depart a goodly departing. And if you desire God and His Apostle and the later alone, then surely God has prepared for the doers of good among you a mighty reward'" (xviii. 28, 29). Thus they were offered two alternatives. They must have either worldly finery, or remain in the Prophet's household. Should they decide to have the former, they would have plenty of what they wanted, but would forthwith forfeit the honour of being the Prophet's wives. Can this be the reply of a sensual man? Such a man would have done

everything to satisfy the whims of the objects of his affection. Nay, he would himself have desired that his wives should wear the most beautiful dress and live in comfort. No doubt the Prophet cherished great love and regard for his wives. "The best of you," he is reported to have said, "is the one who treats his wife best." This illustrates his attitude towards womanhood. He had immense regard for the rights of women and was the champion of their cause. But when his wives came to him with what was apparently quite a legitimate demand to have more of finery and ornaments, they were coldly told that if they would have these things, they were not fit to live in the Prophet's household. Does anyone who is the slave of his passions disregard the wishes of his wives in such a matter? This shows beyond a shadow of doubt how free the Prophet's heart was of all base and sensual thoughts. He is prepared to divorce all his wives rather than yield to what he regards as unworthy of his wives—an inclination towards worldly things. It shows conclusively that the object of his marriages was anything but self-indulgence.

Let us consider once more the historical facts which led the Holy Prophet to take a

number of wives within the short space of five years from the third year of Hijra to the seventh while before that he passed nearly thirty years of his life in a monogamous state. This period coincides exactly with the period during which incessant war was carried on between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. The circle of Muslim brotherhood was at the time very narrow. The perpetual state of war created disparity between the male and the female elements of society. Husbands having fallen on the field of battle, their widows had to be provided for. But bread and butter is not the only provision needed in such cases, as is supposed by certain short-sighted statesmen. Sex inclination is implanted in human nature, and the statesman who neglects the sex requirements leads society to moral corruption, ending ultimately in the ruin of the whole nation. A reformer with whom morals are all in all could not content himself with making provision merely for the maintenance of widows. The Prophet was anxious for their chastity to a far greater extent than their physical needs. It became therefore necessary to allow polygamy. This is the reason that he himself took so many women for his wives during the period when war was raging.

Nearly all of his wives were widows. Where self-indulgence is the motive, the choice does not fall on widows. And there was no dearth of virgins. It would have been an enviable privilege for any Muslim to be father-in-law of the Prophet. But the object was a far noble one—the protection of the widows of his friends. In polygamy alone lay the safety of the Muslim society situated as it then was.

Again, certain political reasons also led to some of the marriages. This was the case in the marriage with Juwairiyyah, lady belonging to the Bani Mustalaq, and such was also the case in the marriage with Safiyyah, the widow of a Jewish chieftain. The Prophet wanted to conciliate both tribes though in the latter case the Jews again proved troublesome in the reign of ‘Umar.

The case of the marriage with Zainab may, however, be specially noted here as calumny has been at work in this case. Zainab was the Prophet's first cousin, being the daughter of his aunt. When she reached the age of majority, she was offered in marriage to the Prophet by her brother. But the Holy Prophet wedded her to Zaid, a slave whom he had himself freed and who was deeply attached to him. The couple



could not however, pull together and after a time Zaid wanted to divorce her. The Prophet dissuaded him as plainly stated in the Holy Qur'ān (xxxiii. 36, 37). But ultimately divorce was found necessary. The divorced woman is generally looked down upon in popular estimation, and this was a case in which a freed slave divorced a lady of high birth. By taking such a divorced woman as his wife, the Prophet wanted to remove the false notion that divorce degraded woman. Thus by this act, to which he was morally bound because the lady had been at first offered in marriage to him, he elevated the whole class of divorced women who would otherwise suffer life long humiliation in society. If he had any desire of self-gratification or if he had any passion for the lady, he would not have refused her when she was offered to him as a virgin. Refusal of her hand in the first instance, and taking her in marriage when being divorced she was lowered in general estimation, shows conclusively that his motive in his marriage was anything but self-gratification.

We now come to the fourth period. With the conquest of Mecca in the year 8. A. H. internal warfare came practically to an end. Disturbances there were, but on the whole peace had

been established in the country and normal conditions were restored. And it is from the eighth year of the Flight to the end of his life that we find that the Prophet did not contract any new marriage. What is the evidence of facts, then ? It is clearly this that the Holy Prophet added to the number of his wives only during the time that he had to live in state of warfare, when the number of males was reduced so that many women would have been left without protection and without a home, if the difficulty had not been solved by permitting a limited polygamy. Before the Prophet had to enter on a defensive warfare, he lived the company of a single wife, and after the war was ended, he contracted no new marriage, and this sets all doubts at rest as to the motive of the Prophet. In all the marriages which he contracted during the war, there was some ulterior moral end in view. There arose situations in his life under which he could not, consistently with the moral and religious mission of his life, help taking more wives than one. In that, he only showed compassion to the weaker sex.

Living in a country in which polygamy was the rule, the Prophet had no liking for polygamy. He passed the prime of his life, up to fifty

three years of age, as the husband of a single wife, thus showing that the union of one man and one woman was the rule under normal conditions. But when abnormal conditions arose, he did not, like a sentimentalist, shirk his duty for the sake of an idea. He saw that the chastity of woman was at stake if polygamy was not allowed, and for the sake of a higher interest he permitted polygamy as an exception to meet exceptional circumstances. Exactly thus he had to resort to war, though by disposition he was averse to it. Full forty years before his Call, he had been living in a land where sword was as freely wielded as a stick elsewhere, where fighting and feuds were the order of the day, where men could fly at each other's throats like wild animals, where there was no chance of survival for one who could not use the sword, yet not once during these forty years did he deal a blow at an enemy. The same was the case with him for fourteen years after the Call. That he was peace-loving by nature is shown by the clear injunctions relating to peace in the Holy Qur'ān : "And if they incline to peace, do thou incline to it, and trust in God...And if they intended to deceive thee, then surely God is sufficient for thee" (viii. 61,62). His acceptance of the truce

of Hudaibiyya, though its conditions were humiliating to the Muslims, who were ready to lay down their lives one and all rather than accept those terms, is also a clear proof of his peace-loving nature. But when duty called him to take the field to save his community, he did not hesitate to take up the sword against an overwhelming majority. He acted as a sagacious general in all fields of battle and behaved like a brave soldier when opportunity demanded. He knew how to disperse an enemy in time before he had gained sufficient strength to deal a severe blow at the Muslims. And once, in the battle of Hunain, when his army was in flight owing to the severe onslaught of the enemy's archers he was all alone advancing towards the enemy, till his soldiers rallied round him. By disposition he had no inclination for war, yet circumstances arose which dragged him into the field of battle, and he then displayed the wisdom of a general and the bravery of a soldier. So by disposition he was not inclined to polygamy, living a celibate life of unexampled purity up to twenty-five years and a married life of a monogamous husband up to fifty-four, but when duty called him to take more women under his shelter, he did answer the call of duty. It may be added in

conclusion that the verse limiting the number of wives to four when a necessity for polygamy arose was in all probability revealed after the Holy Prophet had contracted those marriages, that he was expressly permitted to retain under his shelter all the women whom he had married (xxiii 50), and he did not contract any marriage after the revelation of that verse (xxxiii, 4).

Brief as the treatment of the Prophet's life is, it would be incomplete without a few words about his manners and morals. When his wife Ayesha, the most privy to his secrets, was questioned about his morals, her reply was : "His morals are the Qur'an." In other words, the highest morals that depicted in the Holy Qur'ān were possessed by him.

Simplicity and sincerity are the keynotes of the Prophet's character. He would do all sorts of things with his own hands. He would assist his wives in their household duties. He would milk his own goats, patch his own clothes and mend his own shoes. In person would he dust the house and he would tie his camel and look after it personally. No work was too low for him. He worked like a labourer in the construction of the mosque, and again in digging a ditch



round Medina. In person would he do shopping, not only for his own household, but also for his neighbours or for helpless women. He never despised any work, however humble, notwithstanding the dignity of his position as Prophet and king. He thus demonstrated through personal example that a man's calling does not really determine his nobleness or his meanness. A roadside labourer, a hewer of wood or a drawer of water is as respectable a member of Islamic brotherhood as a big merchant or a high dignitary.

His actions and movements were characterised by homely simplicity. He did not like his companions to rise on his arrival. Once he forbade them, saying : "Do not arise for me, I do the non-Arabs," and added that he was a humble creature of God, eating as others eat and sitting as others sit. When a certain man wanted to kiss his hand, he withdrew it reminding that that was the behaviour of the non-Arabs towards their kings. Even if a slave sent him an invitation he would accept it. He would take his meals in the company of all classes of people, even of slaves. When seated among people, there was nothing about him to make him conspicuous.

The Prophet had deep love for his friends. While shaking hands with them, he would never be the first to withdraw his hand. He met everybody with a smiling face. A report from Jarir bin 'Abdullah says that he never saw the Prophet but with a smile on his face. He would talk freely, never putting on artificial reserve to give himself an air of superiority. He would take up children in arms and nurse them. He disliked back biting and forbade his visitors to talk ill of any of his friends. He would ever take the lead in greeting his friends and shaking hands with them.

The Prophet's generosity even towards his enemies stands unique in the annals of the world. 'Abdullah bin Ubayy, the head of the hypocrites, was sworn enemy of Islam, and his days and nights were spent in plotting mischief against the Muslims. Yet at his death the Prophet prayed to the Lord to forgive him and then granted his own shirt to enshroud his body. The Meccans who had all along subjected him and his friends to the most barbarous tortures were not only awarded a general amnesty but were let off even without a reproof. Twenty long years of persecution and warfare were absolutely forgiven and forgotten. "The mag-

nanimity with which Mahomet treated a people who had so long hated and rejected him is worthy of all admiration," says Muir. The fact is that no other example is met with in history of such magnanimous forgiveness of inveterate enemies, who had shed innocent blood, who had shown no pity to helpless men, women and children, who had exerted themselves to their utmost to kill the Prophet and to annihilate the Muslims. Prisoners of war were almost always set free even without demanding a ransom. It was only in the case of the prisoners of Badr that ransom was demanded ; after that hundred of prisoners and, in one case, in the battle with Hawāzin, as many as 6,000 were released without taking a pice as ransom. At the battle of Uhud, when he was wounded and fell down, a comrade asked him to curse his persecutors. His reply was : "I have not been sent to curse but as an inviter to good and mercy. O Lord guide my people, for they know not." Once a Bedouin pulled him throwing his wrapper round his neck, and when asked why he should not be repaid in the same coin, he pleaded that he (the Prophet) never return evil for evil.

In the administration of justice, the Prophet was scrupulously even-handed. Muslims and

non-Muslims, friend and foe, were all alike in his eyes. Even before the Call, his impartiality, his honesty and integrity were of household name, and people would bring their disputes to him to settle. At Medina when he was not as yet the head of a State, the Jews and the idolaters both accepted him as the arbitrator in all their disputes. Notwithstanding the deep-rooted malice of the Jews against Islam, when a case between a Jew and a Muslim once came up before him, he decreed in favour of the Jew, regardless of the fact that the Muslim nay even perhaps the whole of his tribe, might thereby be alienated. In his dealings with his worst enemies he was always true to the Qur'ānic injunction which says : "Let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably ; act equitably, that is nearer to piety" (v.8). On his death-bed immediately before he breathed his last, he had it publicly announced : "If I owe anything to any body, it may be claimed ; if I have offended anybody, he may have his revenge."

In his dealings with others he never placed himself on a higher pedestal. Once while he held the position of a king at Madina, a Jew whom he owed some money came up to him and began to abuse him. 'Umar was enraged but the

Prophet rebuked him saying : "It would have been meet for thee to have advised both of us—me the debtor to repay the debt with gratitude, and him, the creditor, to demand it in a more becoming manner." And he paid the Jew more than his due. On another occasion when he was out in the woods with his friends, the time for preparation of food came. Everybody was allotted a piece of work, he himself going out to pick up fuel. A spiritual and temporal overlord as he was, he would yet do his share of work like an ordinary man. In his treatment of his servants, he observed the same principle of equality. A report from Anas says that during the ten years that he was in the Prophet's service at Medina, where he ultimately became the master of the whole of Arabia, he was not once scolded by him. He never kept anybody in slavery. As soon as he got a slave, he set him free.

In charity, the Prophet was simply unapproached. He never gave a flat refusal to a beggar. He would feed the hungry, himself going without food. He never kept any money in his possession. While on his death-bed, he sent for whatever there was in his house and distributed it among the poor. Even for the dumb creatures of God his heart overflowed with mercy. He



spoke of a man who drew water from a well to quench the thirst of a dog as having earned paradise with this act of kindness. He spoke of a deceased woman that she was under going punishment because she would fasten her cat and keep it hungry. From his earliest days he had deep sympathy for the widows, the orphans, the poor and the helpless. He would ever stand by the oppressed. He vindicated the rights of women over men, of slaves over their masters, of the ruled over the rulers, and of the subjects over the king. Negro slaves were accorded the same position of honour as the Quraish leaders. He was the champion of the oppressed and the illtreated ones. He was very fond of children, those whom he met on the way. Without fail would he visit the sick to inquire after their health and console them. He would also accompany a funeral.

Humble and meek in the highest degree, he had yet the courage of the bravest of men. Never for a moment did he harbour fear of his enemies. Even when plots to take his life were being hatched in Mecca, he would fearlessly move about day and night. He told all his companions to emigrate from Mecca, himself remain-

ing almost alone among infuriated enemies. With the pursuers at the mouth of the cave in which he hid himself, he could yet console his companion, saying, "God is with us". On the field of Uhud when the whole of his army fell into a sort of a trap, he shouted aloud, regardless of all dangers to his own person, to rally the confused soldiers. In the battle of Hunain when the Muslim rank and file took to flight, he advanced alone towards the enemy, calling aloud "I am the Messenger of the Lord." When a raid was one night suspected, he was the first to reconnoiter the outskirts of Medina, riding his horse without saddling it. On a certain journey while resting under a tree all alone, an enemy came upon him, and unsheathing his sword shouted out: "Who can save thee now from my hands?" Calmly the Prophet replied, "God." And the next moment the same sword was in the Prophet's hand who put to his enemy the same question, on which he assumed a tone of abject humility, and the Prophet let him go.

The Prophet's integrity and sincerity were of universal fame throughout Arabia. His worst enemies had often to confess that he had never told a lie. When he once pledged his word, he kept it under the most trying conditions and

even at a heavy cost. He faithfully observed the truce made at Hudaibiyya, though he had to refuse shelter to Muslims escaping from the persecutions of the Meccans. His biographers are all at one in their admiration for his unflinching fortitude and unswerving steadfastness. Despair and despondency were unknown to him. Hemmed in as he was on all sides by a gloomy prospect and severe opposition; his faith in the ultimate triumph of the truth was never for one moment shaken.







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Ali

Prophet of Islam

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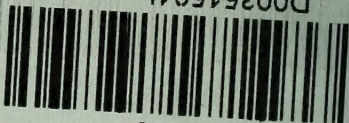


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